

It's All I Want To Do On This Dirt

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Summary: Immediately after losing Claude, Berger tries to help a grieving stranger by performing a miracle for her.

It's All I Want To Do On This Dirt

_Hey everyone! Thanks for deciding to click on my story and (hopefully) read it! _

WARNING: there is an OC in this fic who technically makes it AUâ€|oh, and plot spoilers too

Disclaimer: I don't own Hair just my copy of the recording, and the program, and the book, and the movie, and pictures with the cast, andâ€|well, you get the point.

To say that Berger was upset was the understatement of the century. The man was distraught because the one thing he loved more than anything else in the world had just vanishedâ€|taken from him. He was furious because he knew that he could have kept it if he had only tried harder, been more persuasive and less immature. But mostly he was worried about what might happen to it. The thing Berger had lost wasn't just a material possession, an object. No, he had lost Claude. Lost him to Vietnam, to the war. And that devastated Berger. He constantly blamed himself for anything that might happen to Claude. He could be shot; he could be injured; he could be captured; he could be killedâ€|and it was all Berger's fault. If he had just been able to convince Claude to burn his card, to go to Canada, to stay with him, then he'd know that Claude would be safe, would be there with him. But no. Claude was gone, and there wasn't anything Berger could do about it but wander aimlessly through the park, lost in his own grief.

He spent hours shuffling through the Ramble, not bothering to remember which paths he'd taken or caring to think about how worried the rest of the tribe must be. He just walked. Alone. His thoughts of his lost friend, both good and bad, swirled through his mind. One

minute, he'd be remembering the day that they'd met Margret and Hubert and how they'd laughed with them and playfully answered their questions, but moments later Berger would be struck with visions of Claude stumbling through the jungles, bloody and weary.

It was just getting dark when Berger himself stumbled out of the Ramble. Not caring where he was headed, he let his feet continue to guide him to who knows where. A few minutes later, he realized that he was headed for the Bethesda Fountain. The thought sent a jolt of pain to Berger's heart; the fountain had always been one of Claude's favorite places to go to see the tourists and try out his accent while Berger tagged along looking for money or just some fun. Still, despite the pain of being near a place so closely linked to Claude, Berger couldn't bring himself to turn around and go back the other way. It seemed like something invisible was pulling him along, and who was he to question it? Just as the fountain came into view on his left, Berger saw something that made his heart leap. He knew it had to be the something that had pulled him here.

Sitting on a bench was a figure who appeared to be just as distraught as Berger. Head in hands, the figure shuddered and shook, as though sobbing. Faded, patched jeans and a soft, white shirt graced its form, but Berger barely noticed these things. What he saw most clearly was the figure's hair. It's long, dark golden locks fell wildly, concealing the figure's face from Berger, but he knew that hair. He had run his fingers through those smooth, silky countless times. He had pulled it, twisted it, and played with it every day for the past few months. Just seeing that hair, Claude's hair, brought tears of joy to Berger's eyes. He couldn't hold back any longer; he took off running towards the bench. He didn't stop when he came close enough to hear the figure's sobs; if anything they only pulled him in faster. Without hesitating, Berger threw his arms around the figure, sending comforting thoughts as he gently stroked the golden hair.

As soon as the figure felt Berger's touch, the crying began to slow. The ragged breaths returned to normal, but not for long. Only moments after calming, the figure's head shot up and turned to look at its comforter, tensing up, frozen with unease. This worried Berger. He cautiously released his hold and looked, for the first time, at the figure's face. Seeing the brown eyes he remembered so well brought a smile to Berger's face. Then he looked closer.

These eyes were brownâ€"Claude's brownâ€"but they were different. Both Claude's eyes and this stranger's eyes held pain, warmth, and life, but Claude's had more of a glow. This stranger's eyes had a naïve quality that had left Claude's gaze months ago, soon after he became a part of the tribe. As a confused expression emerged in Berger's own eyes, he pulled back his focus and looked at the rest of the stranger.

The first thing he noticed was that the stranger was a girl. This realization shocked Berger, but the shock only prompted him to continue studying her. His next surprise came from how much the girl really did resemble Claude. He already knew that their eyes were similar, but he had been right about their hair too. Both Claude and the girl had the same honey colored hair, but hers was a little longer than his friend's. She was cleaner than Claude normally was. She probably spent less time sleeping in the park and more time bathing. And although her clothes looked like the garments Claude normally wore, they clearly didn't fit the girl. It was as if they

were made for someone much taller than her. Yet she seemed comforted by the cloth. She even clutched at the hem of the worn, white shirt as if her life depended on it. Berger knew that feeling all too well, as he had often done the same with the hem of Claude's clothing.

When Berger finished looking her over, his gaze went back to the girl's eyes. She seemed startled and a bit frightened, but there was something in her expression that seemed to be pleading for Berger to stay with her and comfort her. Sensing her need, Berger simply treated her as he would treat any member of his tribe and smiled, trying to reassure the stranger and show her that she could trust him. Seeing that he meant no harm, she seemed to relax a little. Letting out a sigh, she averted her gaze to the ground and mumbled, "I'm sorry you have to see me like this," as if she were ashamed that a complete stranger had seen her in such a poor state.

Berger, glad that this girl who reminded him so much of Claude had opened up, replied, trying to sound less broken than he knew he was, "That's alright, Darlin'. I bet I feel just about as bad as you do right nowâ€¦I'm just better at hiding it." His little joke worked; she let out a small laugh and looked back at Berger.

"It's just not fair." Gazing steadily into Berger's eyes, she spoke softly, "Have you ever had the thing that you care most about ripped away from you?" Berger was stunned by the question. It was as if she had looked straight into him and heard exactly what his heart was moaning about. She continued before he had a chance to respond. "I have. The stupid army took my brother away from me today. I never really cared about the war before, but now that he's part of it I can't help but hate it. All I can think about is something happening to himâ€¦worrying that he'll come back injuredâ€¦or that he won't come back at all." She was choking back her tears as she spoke, desperate not to start weeping again. "He was all I had at home, when he was there. He spent more time with his friends here in the park than at the house, and with good reason. Our parents were always harassing him about one thing or anotherâ€¦mostly being a good role model for me. Thing is, he was a perfect role model without them saying anything."

This led her to a thought that was just enough to push her over. Her tears started to fall again. Berger, who hated to see anyone upset, especially someone who seemed to feel just like he did at the moment, quickly wrapped his arms around her again, trying to sooth away the pain. As she calmed again, he let out a breath he didn't know he'd been holding. Then, in a voice so quiet that Berger barely heard, she said, "It's my fault. It's my fault he's gone. He only went because he believed our parents. He believed that going would make them happy. That it would make him a good role model for me."

As she spoke, Berger recognized his own thoughts of self-loathing in her words. He knew how horrible it felt to know that the only reason your best friend was gone was because you hadn't stopped him. Knowing that he needed to do something to show her that he understood, he did the first thing that popped into his head. He confessed, "My best friend went to war today too, just like your brother. He had this ridiculous idea that it was the right thing to do, even though we've been protesting this war with our friends since it started. He was the only one of us who didn't burn his draft card, and he was the only one of us who actually went to Nam. And somehow, I know that I

could have stopped him. Like, if I just tried harder, he'd still be hereâ€¦lying in the grass with all of us. And we'd be happy." As he finished, Berger realized that the girl had stopped crying. She was looking at him, hanging on his every word.

When he stopped speaking, she sniffed a little, and said in a stronger voice. "I think you would have gotten along with my brother. He hated the war too, and he adored his friends. He would have done anything for them. I never met any of them, but I wish I had. I figure if we had worked together, we could have kept him away from the army. That's why I'm here now. I want to meet them. Maybe if we can be together, we can stay strong until he gets back. I know I can't do it alone."

She had a point, and Berger knew it. After all, the tribe had always been stronger than its individual members. They would need each other to pull together after losing Claude. Berger knew he needed them, and they'd need him, now more than ever. And wasn't this what Claude had talked about last night? Wanting to perform miracles? He had said, "It's all I want to do on this dirt," hadn't he? Well, Berger was going to perform a miracle for this girl in honor of Claude. Plus, concentrating on helping this girl would help him forget his own negative emotions, at least for a while. Focusing his thoughts, he offered, "Maybe I can help. My friends and I know this park better than everyone else. If anyone can find your brother's friends, we can." With that, he stood and extended his hand to her in a goofy, overdramatic fashion. Smiling, she accepted his offer by taking his hand. Happily, he pulled her along, glad to hear her laughing behind him.

Soon, they were in the clearing where the rest of the tribe had gathered after the morning's protest. Sheila saw them first. Scrambling to her feet, she ran to meet him, immediately alerting the rest of the tribe of their leader's return. He stopped dragging the girl as soon as they crossed into the grass and waited for the tribe to meet them. Sheila reached them after a few seconds, followed shortly by Woof before the rest of the tribe members made their way to greet him. Berger and his new acquaintance quickly found themselves enveloped in a massive embrace. Berger returned the love before breaking the hug.

Once he had everyone's attention, he addressed his friends. "So, today was tough. Tougher than anything we've been through before, and I know it better than anyone. But someone reminded me that we aren't the only people who lost someone today." He put an arm around the girl's shoulder as he continued, "Guys, this isâ€¦" Berger trailed off before laughing, "Well, I don't actually know who this is. Don't think either of us ever said our names!"

She smiled, and quietly said, "Maggie," to Berger before speaking in a more confident voice to the tribe, "I'm Maggie." She then turned back to Berger, allowing him to continue: "Maggie's brother was swallowed by the Army Abduction Center today along with our Aquarius. From what she's told me, he sounded like a decent guy, and he seemed to love spending time in this park as much as we do. So I kinda promised Maggie that we'd help her search it to find his friends." This statement was met with cheers from the tribe. Internally, Berger rejoiced. He had hoped that the tribe would agree to help, but he wasn't sure if they'd be willing so soon after losing Claude. Turning back to Maggie, he asked, "Do you know any of their namesâ€¦your

brother's friends?"

"Well," she started, "he didn't talk about them much at home latelyâ€|because of our parents. But back when he first met them, he never stopped rambling on about a few of them. Especially these two, Sheila and Berâ€|"

"Wait!" Someone yelled. It took Berger a moment to identify the voice as that of his Sheila. She worked her way through the group until she was on Maggie's other side. She didn't say anything; she just looked at Maggie for a long moment before turning to Berger, saying, "I don't think we're gonna have to look too hard Banana Berger. You do realize who she looks like, don't you?" Berger was momentarily dumbfounded, but not as much as Maggie. Something Sheila had said had shocked the girl. She whipped around to face the man she'd spent the past hour with, trying to form words. After a few seconds she finally stammered, "George Bergerâ€|?"

"Not George. I don't dig George. Just call me Bergâ€|" Berger automatically started to reply. Then it struck him that there was no way Maggie could have known his first name. Not unless someone had told her. Someone like... "Your brother. His name's Claude, isn't it? Claude Hooper Bukowski." All Maggie could do was nod.

Everyone stood frozen in silence. It seemed like an eternity passed before Maggie tentatively took a step toward Berger. Then, in a sudden movement, she threw her arms around him, mirroring the position they had been in when they met. Berger quickly returned the hug, and before he knew it he saw Sheila join the embrace and felt Woof's arms around him. Soon, the entire tribe was in each other's arms there on the Central Park Lawn.

And somehow, Berger didn't feel like someone was missing.

_Wow! 2,481 words! This is officially the longest piece I've written.

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Well, you know the drill! Please review, and let me know if I should continue this or just leave it be. Thanks!

_Peace & Love, _

Nat

End
file.